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ABSTRACT

One example of a professional group sponsoring a student internship program in mass media is the program at North Texas State University sponsored by the International Television Association (ITVA). The junior level internship requires no previous experience outside of production classes and is designed to introduce students to the business world. The senior level, designed to follow the first internship, requires actual production experience, guarantees the student more responsibility on the job and pays at least minimum wage. So that the ITVA has to deal with only one person on campus, the office of cooperative education receives the list of employers and jobs from the ITVA, interviews students to determine their job interests, helps them prepare a resume, and coaches them on interviewing. A placement exam to determine the student's minimum technical skills is given by the radio/television film division. After the interviews are over and the employers have made their choices, any necessary adjustments are made to place all of the students. Students are also given a choice of people with whom to discuss anything that may be troubling them. Despite some initial problems, the ITVA internship program has been a success. Nearly all students have been enthusiastic about their experiences and the employers have been equally pleased with the student interns. (HOD)

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BRIDGING THE GAP: ITVA INTERNSHIPS AT NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Most educators in film and television recognize the usefulness of student internship programs. These programs can provide students with valuable "real world" experience--what it's like to work in the business and professional world, to deal with clients, the corporate structure and projects that are less thrilling than those that they originated in classes. In addition, these jobs can provide them with an opportunity to work with the state of the art equipment that the university cannot afford, as well as making professional contacts that can lead to full time jobs upon graduation.

Although the advantages of internships are evident, setting up and maintaining an internship program can pose several problems. The first is the demand on faculty time. The positions must be located, an agreement worked out with the employers, a certain amount of supervision is required to ensure that both the student and employer are meeting the goals of the program, and an evaluation procedure must be carried out. Ideally, the faculty would determine what some of the needs of employers are to allow them to perform satisfactorily on the job. In an internship program of any size, the amount of faculty time needed is considerable and would either take faculty members out of the classroom or add a substantial burden to their existing schedules.

One possible solution to these problems is to have a professional group sponsor the internships. This offers several advantages. First, they can locate and evaluate jobs more easily than most faculty members. Companies tend to respond better to a proposal to participate in an internship program from a professional group than one initiated by their own personnel.[1] Since they are dealing with their peers, they can help in screening jobs and matching students up with both job demands and personalities. As professionals they are aware of the minimum requirements that they want

in an intern. They know what kinds of things they deal with daily in their work and what would be valuable for students to bring to the internship. The faculty's job now is to prepare students to meet these standards, to match students with the jobs and supervise and give grades for the work.

An example of this in action is the ITVA (International Television Association) Internship program at North Texas State. While NTSU has offered internships in the past, these were often jobs that the students found themselves which met the criteria for internship credit or employers who called the Radio/TV/Film Division looking for student help. While the faculty was not satisfied with this system, heavy teaching loads made it unrealistic for faculty to involve themselves further in developing the program. In the summer of 1981, a meeting with the Educational Task Force of the Dallas ITVA offered a solution to the problem.

This group was established by two ITVA members: Barbara Haley and Jerry Hodges. Both Haley, a former television instructor turned independent producer, and Hodges, an North Texas State University graduate, recalled clearly the problems that they faced in making the transition from school to the work place. Haley remembered the Catch 22 situation: you can't get a job without experience and you can't get experience without a job.[2] Hodges, who developed and heads the highly successful in-house video department at SEDCO, felt that some of his most valuable experience has been gained in a student internship at Texas Instruments under Al Bond. He says frankly, "It gave me an appreciation for business I couldn't have gotten any other way and helped me to get the job I have today."[3] Both felt strongly that their responsibility to their profession called for helping to train competent new employees for the growing job market.

With the help of other Dallas ITVA members interested in this idea, they formulated a proposal and submitted it to several area universities. They wanted to actively participate in the administration and running of the program, which seemed

to bother some of the schools. They planned to locate a number of potential internships, divide them into Junior and Senior levels and offer these to students who met certain standards of competence. The Junior internship required no previous experience outside of the production classes and would be designed to introduce the student into the business world. It was suggested that the employer pay transportation costs and while some might pay minimum wage, this was not a requirement for these jobs. The Senior level, designed to follow the first internship, required actual production experience, guaranteed the student more responsibility on the job and paid at least minimum wage. The ITVA members also wanted to assist the placement and to receive evaluations on the students' progress. The North Texas State Radio/TV/Film faculty accepted their proposal and met to work out its implementation. It was agreed to make up a screening test to establish minimum technical requirements. While this test would eliminate some students from participating in the internships, it was agreed that the ITVA internships would be prestige jobs for which students should expect to complete. The fact that many of these internships were in corporate and non-broadcast video fitted into NTSU's program since classes are offered in non-broadcast production and corporate media. The faculty agreed to help work for the test with the Task Force people, administer and grade it, help place the students and handle the evaluations and grading.

At this point the office of Co-Operative Education at North Texas State University learned of the plans and offered their assistance in the administration of the program. Karen Goetschius explained a process which could relieve the faculty of much of the paper work and provide additional services to both the students and employers. She would receive the lists of employers and jobs from the ITVA, so that the employers would have only one person to deal with on campus. After the students passed the exam, she would interview each one to determine job interests, help them prepare a

resume, and coach them on interviewing. Several jobs would be selected for which they could interview and two or three students were sent to apply for each position. This allowed both the employers and the students a degree of choice instead of simply assigning an internship to each. With Goetschius co-ordinating between employers and students it was more efficient than if several faculty members had been involved.[4]

The working operation of the program now consists of the division giving the placement test. Goetschius interviews and prepares the students, then a faculty member and an ITVA member discuss the jobs and students with her to assist in placement. Since the faculty member knows the students and the ITVA member knows most of the employers, it is possible to match up not only similar interests but also compatable personalities (usually). After the interviews are over and the employers have made their choices, any necessary adjustments are made to place all of the students. Students are encouraged to talk with Karen Goetschius or any faculty member if they have difficulties or problems with their job. This gives them a choice of people with whom to discuss anything that may be troubling them. A final evaluation form is filled out by both the student and the employers, and students also write a report for the division. These form the basis for the final grade.

Any new program is likely to have problems, and our's was not unique in avoiding them. First, the test designed by the ITVA was a short answer, which was very time-consuming to grade. This was solved by changing it to a multiple-choice test with the help of the Task Force. Second, although reading material is available to help prepare students for the test, it is felt that this is not necessarily the best way, as it may simply encourage them to memorize for the test without understanding or being able to actually perform the tasks that they are studying. The ITVA Task Force has suggested two proposals: a hands-on workshop, held on a Saturday, to give students a chance to work with the equipment that they will be tested on, and

the formation of study groups with ITVA members acting as tutors. Although a number of students have failed the test, everyone feels that it is important to maintain these standards and help the students to meet them rather than lower these requirements. The final problem involves educating students in the importance and desirability of internships. While this is obvious to both faculty and ITVA members, students often regard internships as simply one more optional class, one which involves some hardships since they must drive 30 to 40 miles to their job if they live on campus. (Many students already commute from Dallas, so this poses less of a problem to them.) Several ideas have been put forth to publicize these to the students. Since most interns are enthusiastic about their experience, it is planned to produce a video tape of interviews with some of these former interns in which they can talk about their internships and the value that they place on them. This tape could be played in all Radio/TV/Film classes. Another plan is to design a special ITVA bulletin board featuring pictures of interns who work with descriptions of what they do on that job, information about up coming tests, projects and ITVA meetings. Finally, the ITVA will assist students in producing a series of PSAs for members of the United Way of Dallas. Students will form their own production groups, interview their clients, write the scripts and produce the PSA. ITVA members will serve as resource people in the writing, planning and technical production. All of the equipment will be provided by the ITVA. While this will be a non-credit project, it will enable students to get production experience working under professionals and using professional equipment. It should create more interest in the ITVA and the internship program.

Inspite of the initial problems, the ITVA internship program has been a success. Nearly every student has been enthusiastic about their experience and the employers have been equally pleased at the student interns. Five senior interns were hired by their employers upon graduation. This points out an additional advantage to employers using interns: the opportunity to observe a prospective employee over a period of time. As one told Haley,

> I can look at a person over a three month period of time under actual field conditions. It gives me a good idea of the advancement potential of this person. Therefore, I'm not basing my judgment on one interview. At the end of three months either I get a new intern or say, "Hey, he's good, I want to hire him." It's the best way for me to hire a person.[5]

Apparently this is a view shared by most employers, making participation in the program more than just a noble gesture toward "helping the university." The ITVA internship program has been exciting in that it establishes closer ties between the faculty, students and business community. The faculty is more in touch with the business world, and the students are more aware of the opportunities that await them upon graduation.

Footnotes

[1]Interview with Jerry Hodges, Manager of Video Department, SEDCO, Dallas, July 19, 1982.

[2]Interview with Barbara Haley, free-lance video producer, Dallas, July 9, 1982.

[3]Jerry Hodges.

[4]Interview with Karen Goe.achius, Associate Director of Cooperative Education, North Texas State University, July 9, 1982.

[5]Cited by Barbara Haley from an interview with Glen Gurgiola, Operations Manager, On-TV, Dallas, May 22, 1982.